World Summit for Children

Update #14 — 14 December 1990

Back...by popular demand!

Though we thought we had published the last Summit Update in October, we have received many requests for news on "What's happening now?". This Update includes news on many post-Summit and follow-up actions underway, illustrating that the momentum of the World Summit for Children has only just begun. UNICEF welcomes information on other activities, especially those undertaken by governments and non-governmental organizations. This Update #14 is an interim communications channel; UNICEF is currently revising its organizational publications, and will include on-going Summit follow-up news in revised publications.

Initiators conclude work; promise to work on follow-up

Expressing deep satisfaction with the World Summit outcome, the six Initiating Governments decided at a meeting in Mexico City on 6 November to concentrate on following up on Summit commitments. Although they would not continue as a formal group, they agreed to consult informally and help UNICEF and others implement the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. Personal Representatives of the Initiators prepared a draft resolution for the UN General Assembly to underscore the responsibilities of the international system and agencies in implementation, and to ensure proper monitoring and evaluation at the international level. They agreed that their countries should set an example domestically, and promised they would each proceed systematically with actions under Paragraph 34 of the Plan of Action. They also agreed to take special responsibility for follow-up within their respective regions, and to instruct their representatives in regional and international organizations and fora to play leading roles in advocating Summit follow-up actions. The Initiators recognized the important role of the non-governmental sector and promised to seek the involvement of NGOs in their national programmes, and encouraged UNICEF to identify ways to involve NGOs effectively at the international level. The Initiators also agreed to advise their embassies to respond helpfully to any request from UNICEF Representatives for assistance in follow-up work to the Summit. Finally, the Initiators expressed strong appreciation to the UNICEF and UN Secretariats for their vision and hard work in making the Summit an historic success.

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Now for action, says President Salinas

Rhetoric at the World Summit must now be put into action, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari of Mexico reminded participants at a meeting on 7 November 1990 to monitor and evaluate work on behalf of his country's children. "We must not betray the expectations that have been generated (by the Summit). Each country must now transcend the level of words and adopt concrete programmes aimed at providing rapid and enduring solutions. Our purpose is to put into operation concrete actions aimed at fulfilling the commitments set forth in the Summit Declaration." The televised meeting at Los Pinos, the presidential residence, was attended by Cabinet members, Personal Representatives of the Heads of State/Government of the other five Summit initiating countries, and UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant. Mr. Salinas requested UNICEF's help to monitor and evaluate -- every six months -- progress being made in meeting the needs of Mexican children. He concluded the meeting, noting: "We have established precise, measurable goals...to evaluate the progress being achieved. Our success will depend on our ability to enlist the wide-spread support of Mexican society". An inter-ministerial commission established to oversee Mexico's implementation of the Summit goals met with Mr. Grant to discuss actions to be taken and mechanisms for the first phase of post-Summit follow-up. Mr. Grant observed: "We are seeing here in Mexico what the World Summit was all about."

General Assembly resolutions on Summit follow-up

The Third (social and humanitarian) Committee of the UN General Assembly, approving a resolution in November declaring 1994 the International Year of the Family, welcomed the successful conclusion of the World Summit for Children and its Declaration and Plan of Action, and the early entry into force of the Convention on Rights of Child. On 7 December, the Second (economic) Committee approved a resolution on the response of the United Nations system to the World Summit and the Plan of Action for the 1990s. The resolution urges all relevant organs, organizations and bodies of the UN system to take into account the Declaration and Plan of Action in carrying out their programmes, and to consider specific measures to address the special needs of children. It requests the Secretary-General to ensure the implementation and monitoring by the UN system, asking him to report to the General Assembly at its 1992 session. Both Committees' resolutions were co-sponsored by near-record numbers of Member States.

Religious leaders support "first call"

World religious leaders have voiced strong support for the principle of "first call for children" contained in the World Summit Plan of Action. "The children of the world must be protected," said the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP), a group representing several major faiths, in a 21st anniversary statement on "peace and freedom of the world" issued jointly in Kyoto, Japan, on 20 October with the Jimmy Carter Presidential Center. "The state of childhood, with its attendant vulnerability, dependence and potential, founds a principle that the human community must give children's

basic needs a priority over competing claims -- and a "first call" upon the human and material resources of our societies. Our children must be nurtured, cared for and educated so that, as heirs of the history of the world, they may be capable of living with integrity." WCRP President Reverend Nikkyo Niwano and former U.S. President Jimmy Carter signed the statement. WCRP organized the "World's Religions for the World's Children" Conference at the Princeton Theological Seminary last July as a prelude to the World Summit.

Cuba and Ecuador sign Summit Declaration

President Fidel Castro of Cuba signed the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action in Havana on 23 November in the presence of a UNICEF delegation. Granma, the official daily newspaper, gave front-page coverage to the event. The government has established mechanisms to implement the Summit's recommendations. In Quito, President Rodrigo Borja-Cevallos of Ecuador also signed the document, promising that his government would "deepen efforts to better life and conditions of children."

Uganda sets up interim monitor committee

Participants at a Summit follow-up conference in Kampala, 6-9 November, recommended that an interim committee be set up immediately pending the establishment of a national council to monitor the situation of children in the country. Prime Minister Samson Kisekka, opening the meeting, noted that "children still die from preventable diseases and the situation is further aggravated by the AIDS epidemic and a growing number of orphans". One of Uganda's child delegates at the Summit also addressed the conference on major areas of action. First Deputy Prime Minister Eriya Kategaya reiterated the government's commitment to the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. "Achieving these goals requires active involvement and participation of communities, NGOs and the government," he said. Participants included ministers of health, planning and economic development, water and mineral development, justice, social relief and rehabilitation, women representatives of the National Resistance Council and members of national NGOs.

Girls appeal to South Asian summit

"Protect us from exploitation and from early marriage and motherhood, for which we are not ready, but give us opportunities to develop to our full potential physically, intellectually and emotionally." Seven girls made this plea on behalf of children like themselves to leaders at the Fifth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) in Male, the Maldives, in late November. "We, the girl children of SAARC, live in societies where we are less than equal," they pointed out in a touching World Summit-style finale to the inaugural ceremony. "We are victims of social injustice and discrimination. We also need love and care and the right to childhood," they added. They also thanked the leaders for making 1990 the SAARC Year of the Girl Child, which the Fifth Summit has decided to extend as the SAARC Decade of the Girl Child, 1991-2000. Responding, President Maumoom Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives, the summit's host and current SAARC chairman, promised that their plea would receive top priority. In their inaugural

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addresses, he and then-President Mohammad Ershad of Bangladesh and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan appealed to SAARC leaders to forge a common alliance to capitalize on the opportunities created by the World Summit and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The heads of state or government observed in their declaration that the World Summit had given a new impetus to child survival and development efforts in the region. The Summit's recommendations, they said, could be usefully incorporated into a plan of action in the South Asian context. Welcoming the entry into force of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the leaders urged member countries which have not become party to the Convention to do so at an early date.

Indian Prime Minister signs Summit Declaration

Prime Minister Chandra Sekhar of India signed the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action at a meeting with UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant in New Delhi in late November. Mr. Grant was in India to receive the Indira Gandhi Prize on behalf of UNICEF from President Venkataraman, who took the occasion to announce that India would ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child early. Mr. Sekhar, who had highlighted the welfare of children in his first address to the nation soon after taking office in early November, commended UNICEF for its efforts to "bring hope and cheer to children" -- a cause, he said, that was also close to the late Mrs. Gandhi's heart. He also mentioned India's initiatives in the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC) that culminated in the World Summit. Both Mr. Sekhar and Mr. Grant praised non-governmental and voluntary organizations in India for their active role in child protection, survival and development.

Egypt Children's Day recalls Summit

Beginning for the first time with a nationally televised ministerial review of what is being done for children, National Children's Day celebrations in Egypt on 20 November highlighted the significance of the World Summit. First Lady Suzanne Mubarak opened the celebrations, during which the Prime Minister and the ministers of education, health, youth and sports, social welfare and culture referred to the "historical importance" of the Summit and Egypt's role as one of the Summit's six Initiators. The Summit was seen as a backdrop to President Hosni Mubarak's Declaration of the Decade for the Protection of Children 1989-1999. Mrs. Mubarak used the occasion to dramatize the need to combat illiteracy during the 1990s.

Salvador congress a "mini Summit"

Opening the Sixth National Congress on Children in San Salvador, 8-11 October, President Alfredo Cristiani of El Salvador defined his government's policy on child welfare in the light of the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. Mr. Cristiani, who had taken part in the Summit a week earlier, challenged the 400-odd participants at the congress to propose and discuss new initiatives. The congress, dedicated to "Salvadoran children and their rights", heard 44 national and international presentations in discussion panels. The National Council on Children, the event's main organizer, used the meeting to revise and improve the government's draft national policy on

child protection. The congress made recommendations on such issues as legal and children's rights, health, education, children in especially difficult circumstances and the family. Some proposals have been included in such legislation as the family code and the adoptions decree. Mr. Cristiani and the First Lady also presented national media awards to journalists supportive of children.

U.S. firms in corporate alliance for children

Major companies in the United States which set up a Corporate Alliance for Child Survival two days after the World Summit continue to raise funds for the U.S. Committee for UNICEF. Several of the 22 founding members of the alliance have pledged to achieve the initial $1 million dollar target and to provide on-going funds for UNICEF during the 1990s. More than $600,000 was raised in less than four weeks, an indication of healthy corporate support for children, said James Wood, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company ("A&P"), and a leader of the alliance. "But as we have learned from global leaders...the children of the world have vast and growing needs," he added. "By educating our peers, working to understand these problems, and assembling the monies needed to combat them, our planet will be a much better, healthier place by the year 2000." Hugh Downs, chairman of the U.S. Committee, who was at the launch of the alliance on 2 October, described the initiative as "an exciting partnership with our nation's leading corporations to save, potentially, millions of children's lives over the next decade."

Mauritius promises children better life

Appropriate infrastructure will be set up with the formation of a National Children's Council to look after the needs of Mauritian children in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Mauritius Governor-General Sir Veerasamy Ringadoo announced at the opening of the Legislative Assembly recently. Emphasizing the enhanced role of women and concern for child protection, he said the objective was to make the country a better place to live for present and future generations. Besides child protection, he said, "it is the firm conviction of my government that economic development cannot be a reality without the elimination of all forms of sex discrimination and without equal opportunities to women."

Brazil TV raises money for street children

With the World Summit fresh in the public's mind, TV Globo of Brazil raised $800,000 for street children during the country's Child Week in October. With UNICEF support, the station ran the Child and Hope Campaign for the fifth consecutive year, with proceeds going to basic education and child survival. Also, Health Minister Alceni Guerra announced on World Food Day that, over the next five years, the government would allot $3 billion to nutrition programmes in Brazil.

Parliamentarians urge action on Summit plan

More than 400 parliamentarians from 89 countries at the Inter-Parliamentary Union conference in Punta del Este, Uruguay, in October unanimously adopted a resolution sponsored by Canada and Pakistan urging members to press their governments to implement the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action and to "ensure that adequate financial resources are available for these purposes." The resolution called on national parliaments "to take necessary steps...to monitor the implementation of the Summit Plan of Action" at the national, regional and international levels. The conference, in which UNESCO played an important role, also approved a resolution asking parliaments and governments to adopt measures to attain free compulsory basic education for all.

Costa Rican children favour right to protection

Most of the 480,000 of Costa Rica's 685,000 children who took part in a nation-wide poll on 14 September chose protection against drugs, sexual abuse and violence over other children's rights, including the right to play. The young people, each of whom could vote for two rights, ranked next in importance the right to study and play. The other rights favoured (in order of importance) were the rights to the love and care of parents; to life, name and nationality; to live in a house, eat, be clean and healthy and, if sick, to be cured; and to demand that government teach them rights, and to comply with and to enforce them. The results were similar to those of a poll in Ecuador, where 150,000 children voted on 30 June 1990 for the right to protection and to ask the Government to make children's rights known to all, to comply with them and to ensure that others respect them as well. [See Summit Update #8].

Secretary-General says "thank you"

UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar expressed his "deep satisfaction at the outstanding success of the World Summit for Children" soon after the event. He wrote: "It captured the imagination of people everywhere and, I believe, focused the attention of the leaders of the world on a cause which is of central importance for the future of the world -- the survival, protection and well-being of children. We can all be very happy with the outcome. I know the immense effort that the World Summit entailed for UNICEF and would like to thank you and your dedicated staff personally for this." UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant also expressed gratitude to his staff and colleagues in the UN Secretariat for making the Summit "an incredible success". At a reception at UNICEF House on 7 December 1990, he presented the official Summit photograph as mementos to UN departments, offices and services which assisted in the holding of the Summit.

For poor children, every lira counts

Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti of Italy, returning from the World Summit where, he said, "Heads of State and Government momentarily forget problems in the Gulf in order to focus on children," has reportedly proposed that the

Education Ministry reinstitute a system to collect funds in schools for poor children. The Corriere Della Sera newspaper said if every Italian student contributed 20 lire daily, several billion lire each year could be collected for poor children worldwide.

Report focuses on "keeping the promise"

The 1991 State of the World's Children (SWC'91) report, to be released in Berlin on 19 December with satellite link-up to Nairobi, has as its theme "keeping the promise" of the World Summit. It includes 18 panels, full texts of the Convention on Rights of Child and the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action. All or parts of SWC'91 are being published in some 30 languages and copies are being distributed worldwide as this Update goes to press.

Summit media coverage book available soon

The Division of Information, UNICEF New York, is preparing a book incorporating a wide range of the print, television and radio coverage of the World Summit and events leading up to it. The book will contain examples of media reports from all regions, with some colour reproductions.

Pocket-book on Convention & Summit documents

A pocket-sized booklet containing the texts of the Convention on the Rights of the Child together with the World Summit Declaration and Plan of Action is now available from UNICEF's Information Division.

"One Day in September" video

A 27-minute video summary of the World Summit for Children and what it can mean for children worldwide will be available in early January. The video will include footage from the Summit and the discussion interventions of many of the participating leaders, as well as segments illustrating the issues the Heads of State/Government were addressing.

Wellington holds youth mini-summit

New Zealand students made recommendations in four key areas -- health, education, the environment and children's rights -- at a youth mini-summit for children in Wellington on Universal Children's Day, 24 October 1990. About 50 intermediate school students, ranging from 11 to 13 years, took part in the event, playing the roles of youth ambassadors representing Australian aborigines, Bangladesh, Germany, Indonesia, Romania, South Africa, Tokelau and Western Samoa. Each gave a brief presentation on the situation of children in the country of their study. Wellington Mayor Jim Belich opened the mini-summit and Dr. Ian Hassall, tne New Zealand High Commissioner for Children, gave the closing address. The students also viewed a Summit video. Their recommendations have been forwarded to Prime Minister Jim Bolger of New Zealand as well as to UNICEF.

Venice colloquium keeps up momentum

"The message of the World Summit is still burning in our hearts," said UNICEF National Committee representatives at a colloquium on "What future for the next generation?" hosted by the Italian Committee in Venice in October 1990. Recognizing that the Summit had opened "an unprecedented opportunity for advocacy and resource mobilization," participants discussed possible follow-up actions in government, international, multi-lateral and private sector fund-raising and debt relief for children. Working groups used the Summit Declaration and Plan of Action as a basis to talk about children in especially difficult circumstances, children in armed conflict, children and the environment, alleviation of poverty, the role of the family and women in development as well as child health, nutrition and basic education and literacy. Participants in a working group on education for development took part in a series of sample classroom activities that could be used by teachers to explore such themes as co-operation, interdependence, communication, conflict and education for the future. The colloquium also emphasized the need to promote the ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

National Committees follow up...

UNICEF National Committees in the industrialized countries are already taking advantage of opportunities created by the World Summit for advocacy, fund-raising, information and education for development initiatives.

In advocacy...

Many NatComs -- such as those in Canada, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States -- are working with their government and parliament to bring about early ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child or on mechanisms for implementation where the Convention has already been ratified. Some are seeking a national debate on children's issues, sometimes both domestic and international, attempting in some cases to inscribe these as an agenda item in parliament or in a national conference. The Finnish NatCom, for example, is trying to get the national parliament to dedicate two days to such issues. A few are pursuing the establishment of a national commission for children or a parliamentarian group for children. They are also broadening their base of support among youth and other volunteers. The Italian NatCom, for instance, continues to enlarge the grand alliance of citizens, professional groups and NGOs for children and UNICEF.

...in fund-raising...

The Summit has boosted Natcoms' efforts in public fund-raising especially in Europe, where sales of UNICEF greeting cards have picked up earlier and stronger in some countries and where spontaneous collections have sprung up in others. Political support at the highest level for children is also expected to generate corporate interest. The Turkish NatCom, for example, is receiving funds that private firms have collected on their own for UNICEF. The state

bank in Turkey has asked its 2,500 branches to organize campaigns and several other banks are distributing Greeting Card flyers with their account statements. Other NatComs are seeking increased government contributions to UNICEF and a redistribution of overall ODA assistance according to the objectives in the Summit documents.

...and in information and education for development...

Some NatComs are encouraged by the increased access to the media and a new interest in and focus on education for development brought about by the Summit. They are expected to intensify their efforts in the new year. Development officers from the Swedish NatCom, for example, have been in constant touch with teachers and schools to keep them informed about the Summit and the Convention. In Finland, the NatCom is stressing the concept of mutual dependence and population and environmental issues in its information and education for development work.

Sri Lankan MPs focus on Convention

Government and opposition parliamentarians in Sri Lanka set aside burning political issues recently to spend an entire morning focusing their attention on children and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Convened on 22 October by the Speaker of Parliament, Mr. M.H. Mohamed, who is chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Sri Lanka Group for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the meeting was attended by 65 of the 75 Members of Parliament invited. They included Cabinet members and senior parliamentarians from all political parties. The Speaker emphasized and the meeting endorsed the importance of translating the Convention into law and plans of action. The participants adopted a resolution urging the authorities to "make every endeavour to comply with the Convention within the existing political, economic, social, cultural and religious conditions of Sri Lanka." They stressed the need to initiate protection even before birth, meaning more concern for mothers' welfare, and discussed such measures as the "Child Watch" programmes for emergency situations, income-generation for mothers, the principle of "first call" for children and the prevention of child exploitation in tourism. The meeting also set up a 15-member parliamentary committee to expedite the ratification of the Convention and to monitor its implementation. The Speaker indicated that he would ask for a half-day discussion on the Convention at the forthcoming South-east Asian Parliamentarians meeting.

Zambia churches hold service on children

A week after the World Summit, the Christian Council of Zambia held an inter-denominational service at the Anglican Cathedral in Lusaka to unite all churches in working towards the well-being of Zambian children. President Kenneth Kaunda offered a reading and addressed the congregation on 7 October.

Sudan to redouble UCI efforts in south

President Omar Hassan Ahmed El Bashir of the Sudan issued a decree on 16 October urging the redoubling of efforts to reach universal child immunization, particularly among displaced and low-coverage populations in the south. The United Nations has been authorized to resume flights supplying the south with vaccines and immunization equipment. Mr. El Bashir, reporting to his Command Council and Cabinet on the World Summit that he attended, has also asked the steering committee of a recent National Symposium on Children to follow up on Summit recommendations. The president is expected to chair a National Council for Children, which will include regional councils, NGOs and experts.

Tunisia to consider ratifying Convention

The Tunisian Parliament has scheduled the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the agenda of its meeting in December 1990. Beji Caid Essebsi, President of the Chamber of Deputies, will be urged to help in obtaining an early ratification of the document. The 250 Deputies have received information kits in Arabic and French sensitizing them on the impact of the Convention on children's well-being.

Aquino signs Declaration, launches plan

Philippine President Corazon C. Aquino has signed the Summit Declaration, signifying her country's full adherence to its provisions. Witnessing the ceremony at Malacanang Palace in Manila on 11 December 1990 were senators, congressmen, cabinet members and representatives from NGOs, international development agencies and children from urban poor communities and institutional homes. The President also proclaimed a National Plan of Action for Children, the country's "strongest statement" of commitment to promote the welfare and protect the rights of every Filipino child. Referring to the human dignity of every child, the plan adheres closely to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. "While the present status of our children is far from ideal," said Mrs. Aquino, "we have great faith that the goals we have set to mend the broken spirit of our deprived young will usher in renewed hope in their hearts even as they strengthen our vision of a productive and vigorous citizenry."

Nepal and Pakistan also sign Declaration

Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai of Nepal signed the Summit Declaration at a ceremony on 12 December 1990 attended by senior Cabinet members, including the ministers of finance, justice, health and the country's delegation to the Summit. Pakistan has also signed the Declaration, a copy of which was presented to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif by UNICEF Executive Director James P. Grant in early December.

Ministers issue Puntarenas Declaration

Central American ministers of health and education have urged the international community to increase political, technical and financial support to programmes for the young to "allow the recovery and development of the region and a more humane environment for children and their families, and a future of peace and liberty." Meeting in Puntarenas, Costa Rica, from 31 October to 1 November to follow up on their presidents' commitments at the World Summit, 14 ministers from Belize, El Salvador, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama signed a joint agreement on co-ordination of health and education programmes in Central America. They also met with 13 donor countries and UNICEF to discuss future needs in health, education and water and sanitation.

Quotable Quote

"It is a happy coincidence that the World Summit for Children was convened during the SAARC Year of the Girl Child, which has served to demonstrate that gender equality will be reflected in all that we do. We may also observe that there are few issues confronting children which, as a practical matter, are not issues also confronting women in general."

President Maumoom Abdul Gayoom of the Maldives at the Fifth Summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC)

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